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The Village Schools of New Mexico



Atrisco San Mateo
Cubero San Rafael
Marquez Seboyeta

American Missionary Association

287 Fourth Avenue, New York City

The Village Schools



If some friendly Power succeeds in giving back to Mexico that big Southwest of ours, we should lose a domain imperial in stretch, but with the population of a single second-class city. Here and there are thriving towns which bulk large in the midst of the desert, but would be elsewhere inconspicuous. It is a land of brilliant light and of scenic beauty. The sculpture of land-forms was never more interesting for



A MESA

variety and color. All about are Grand Canyons, except for size. In the distance are sharply pointed mountain ranges and in the foreground flat-top mesas with sheer perpendicular walls. A giant used one for his table once and spilled his coffee; the stain of it running down over the valley made a lava bed a hundred miles long. But the formula for the land is emptiness. As it says of itself, "there is more scenery and less to see than anywhere else in the world."

A hundred miles northwest of the center of state stretches Valencia County under the shadow of Mt. Taylor. This is our prosaic name for the sacred rain mountain of the Navajos — an impressive isolated peak, but notable chiefly for the immense buttresses which it throws out in every direction, like a Titan sprawling on a dozen legs and knees. Between these roots of the mountain, rise most of the streams which scantily water tens of thousands of square miles of land. The water falls from clouds which Mt. Taylor catches upon his summit, breaks out in glorious mountain springs, and all too soon loses itself in the sands of the desert. To these scant fountain heads, forgotten years ago, came Mexican pioneers of mingled Spanish and Indian descent. They are part of a Pilgrim movement which began in the Southwest before our Pilgrim Fathers ever reached these shores. But how different their pilgrimage from ours! Briefly, theirs went a step or two and then stopped, while ours has been going right forward for three centuries. Progressive change has been the master-word of our story; stagnation of theirs.

These mountain villages present the oldest and extremest cases of rural isolation in America. Inbreeding, both physical and mental, has done its worst. The mountain problem as we know it in the South has been super-imposed upon the race problem and both upon the rural problem for three centuries.

Mud-walled villages, kept alive by little trickles of water in mountain fastnesses, with such human material so concentrated upon itself, have necessarily molded their people into a solidarity and have destroyed the capacity for individual initiative and independent action beyond all imagining. This caps the climax of missionary difficulty.

Of the world they know next to nothing. As Americans they are utterly loyal with the loyalty of complete ignorance. Of Mexico with its politics and revolution they are virtually unaware, and almost equally so of American affairs. Their politics, like their faith, and everything else about them, is traditional.

One who loves quaintness of atmosphere and manner finds much in these villages which pleases. Mud houses have great architectural possibilities and streams in the desert have stirred the poetical depths in man since the Psalmist's time. In the contrasts of blinding sunshine and deep shadow, in the touches of green in tiny gardens and occasional meadows, in the brilliant decorative red of festoons of peppers drying by every door, the stranger's eye finds delight. In these little seething centers nothing can be done under cover. The blinding light of the desert is not greater than the light of publicity which attends every deed. A courtship, for example, is the affair of a group rather than of two individuals. When Tomás wants to ask Tomacita to marry him, he goes in procession with his relatives

to her house, all firing their revolvers; and if she rejects him he gets not the "mitten," but the "squash."

Some of our missionary teachers have taken great pleasure in setting down the picturesque old Spanish ballads of the wars, the cattle trail and the simple joys of lowly life. Sadly enough the villages have no national anthem and but a pale and remote counterpart for "Home, Sweet Home." But they have their own very interesting folk dances, and even their superstitions have a playful and innocent side, as well as the black and horrid one.

On the side of morals and faith, the story is anything but pleasant. Inbreeding has brought fundamental demoralization in many forms, and not a little suggestion of physical degeneracy. Every one knows of their strange medieval perversion of the Catholic faith which survives so strangely in the New World in the Penitentes. Their bloody procession of scourging and their self-torture in the name of Christ, equal the extremest forms of Indian excesses in the name of pagan god. The cult is, of course, not orthodox from the Catholic standpoint, but its grip upon the villages is strong. Even unbelieving politicians often find it advantageous to ally themselves with the Penitentes on account of their influence. Sometimes they have their own rival sects with separate chapels in settlements of a few hundred people.

In the struggle of a New Mexican villager for a living, there is much

which parallels and helps us to understand the case of old Mexico. Here as there, much land was anciently held by communities rather than by individuals. The ancient grants in the valley of Valencia County were to groups of colonists whose descendants owned their lands in common. Gradually the land has come into demand and Anglo-Saxon ideals of ownership have competed with primitive Spanish ideals. The poor have largely lost the land. Sometimes it has been gradually acquired by the rich man of the vil-



VILLAGE HOME

lage by whom they were enticed into debt. His big house now flaunts itself in striking contrast with the common poverty of the village. Sometimes shrewd American speculators have bought out the heirs to undivided holdings and have been able to evict the unsuspecting majority from much of their property. One must look on the good side of this process as well as the bad. The ownership of land is one of the most solemn responsibilities of any civilization. When it is in the hands of the incompetent, the nation starves.

A hungry world cannot afford merely to respect the outworn economies of an ancient day; yet the harshness and injustice of the process is none the less real. The loss of land is now sifting the people of the villages as never before. The more energetic are driven out to homestead in new regions and to learn independence in the school of individual ownership and competition. Put with this the newly insistent call of the Nation for laborers incident to the cutting off of immigration on account of the world war, and one



VILLAGE CHURCH

comes upon a crisis in the life of the villages, the like of which all their slumbering centuries have never seen. It has always been easier for us to bring some alien mountaineer from the shadow of the Carpathian Mountains than to extract our own Mexican from his Valencia County village. Only now that the European supply is cut off, is the villager hearing the world's cry for labor and pressing out of his isolation to take his part in the great adventure of modern life.

The Mexican village has never definitely developed the central social institutions which any Anglo-Saxon village of the same size would take for granted. It goes without saying that there are no sidewalks or sewers. There is no resident doctor. Of course there is no newspaper. There is a feeble public school taught usually by half prepared teachers of scarcely more experience than their neighbors. Often the teacher's position is used as a political perquisite or is under the control of the Catholic Church.

Catholicism is represented by a mud chapel, often crumbling from disuse, and a non-resident priest, living one hundred miles away, who comes occasionally and charges an impoverishing fee for performing religious rites. The faith of the people is traditional rather than vital, and in the main, the opposition of Romanism to Protestant work is a matter of atmosphere rather than of acute attack. One regrets to add that Protestantism has been able to do but little better in the way of fully organized church life. Our Protestant ministers also are absentees who come for occasional stated services or to hold evangelistic meetings. The continued religious life of the village is in the hands of the mission school.

The Village Mission schools in their little adobe or stone buildings, harmonize with the country and their surroundings. Within, are pleasant rooms and provision for modest comfort. Sometimes the teachers' quar-

ters are attached to the school building, and sometimes they occupy a separate house. Generally there are two teachers, but sometimes only one, with a young girl for companion and helper. Most of the homes have patches of shade near at hand, and sometimes canals of running water. All look out on beautiful scenery and look up to Mt. Taylor or some of his subordinate mountains.

Perhaps it would be better not to call them schools, but settlements. This is what they are primarily. They constitute practically the only resident force of the village for definite Americanization and Christianity. There they have been for many years until the better hopes and aspirations of the village cling around them with pathetic devotion.

Next, let us remember that, of course, the primary service of such little institutions is first not to the child as a pupil, but to the child as a child, and to the child's home. It is equally to his infant brothers and sisters, his parents, and his old grandmother that the school ministers. Like the village itself, the school becomes the intense expression of the neighborly life.

Sometimes it has to step in to take the place of some of the absent institutions which ordinary communities have and take for granted, as indicated by the following:

“Some years ago, Miss Collings, at Cubero, going about as is her wont to visit the sick, discovered what looked like smallpox.

“She at once summoned the government physician for the Indians from Laguna, twelve miles distant, who confirmed her diagnosis. The county health officer from Los Lunas, seventy-five miles distant, was called to the scene and vaccine procured.

“Of course, the school had to be closed, but the teachers devoted themselves entirely to the business of vaccination and care of the sick. Fortunately the disease assumed a light form; sixty cases occurred, but not a single death resulted. The superintendent at once got in touch



SAN RAFAEL SCHOOL

with the county health officer, arranged for a supply of vaccine to be sent to all our teachers, who immediately entered on a vigorous campaign of vaccination. Sporadic cases of the disease occurred at other points, but it is believed that a widespread epidemic was averted by the prompt and energetic measures taken. The value of this work to the community has been greatly appreciated, even the priest having expressed personally to Miss Collings his appreciation of her great service to the people.”

Educationally, the schools naturally cover only the elementary grades and are chiefly patronized by the very youngest pupils. A few older boys and girls reaching up into adolescence remain in the lower grammar grades. Among them are sometimes the children of American ranchers or government employes. The work shows the ordinary pleasing informality of the American rural school.

Besides living their religion and bringing it into the homes of the vil-



SAN RAFAEL PUPILS

lage and the hearts of individuals, the schools, of course, conduct their stated services, and have sent on, their successive generations of children with at least a rudimentary knowledge of the Christian Scriptures and of our Pilgrim ideals of faith and conduct.

It takes a brave heart and a cheery soul to work in such isolation, and it takes a rare measure of the faculty of finding interest in people to keep one alert and progressive where there is such abun-

dant lack of external stimulus. Our teachers have generally, however, met these tests with conspicuous bravery and success. Sometimes tragedies come which would shake the stoutest soul. Thus, only this year, a faithful worker lost her little daughter through typhoid. With the child, she was living alone in her mountain village while the husband had the older children down in the city for its higher school privileges. The mother drove thirty miles over the unspeakable mountain roads to the nearest doctor on an Indian Reservation. He prescribed for her, but from fear of an epidemic they were literally driven from the village and forced to go back over the weary miles to their lonely home. The physician was not hard-hearted, but felt a primary responsibility for the health of the Indians under his care. For the missionary, however, the results were none the less tragic; as a result of the disease and exposure the child died.

This is one of our representatives—one who is doing for us what it is the duty of the Christian church to do; one who is doing in her own person what we can only do indirectly through giving and sympathetic prayer. She has not failed in her part, and we should not in ours.

Average Monthly Enrollment

Atrisco	88
Cubero	48
Marquez	23
San Rafael	47
San Mateo	41
Seboyeta	49
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	296

Typical Budget of Village Schools

(Including El Paso, Texas)

SALARIES :

Four principals and social workers at \$550 and furnished quarters	\$2,200
Five teachers who have served over two years at \$425 and furnished quarters	2,125
Four teachers beginning service at \$385 and furnished quarters	1,540
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	\$5,865

OPERATING EXPENSES :

Books and school supplies	\$125
Fuel, lights and water...	150
Furniture and furnishings	200
Repairs	150
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	\$ 625

Total Appropriations (Average)	\$6,490
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NOTE.—The above estimates are approximate. They may be more or less in any given year, depending upon circumstances and variation in the teaching force. Insurance, supervision, new buildings and special repair appropriations when needed are not included and *must be extra*.

The American Missionary Association solicits designated gifts for any of the items on the above schedule.

American Missionary Association

287 Fourth Avenue, New York

DISTRICT OFFICES

Eastern District

14 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.

Western District

19 South La Salle Street, Chicago, Ill.

Pacific District

21 Brenham Place, San Francisco, Cal.